



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We have entered into the season of Lent. Every year, the first Sunday of Lent focuses on Jesus' temptations and how He overcomes those temptations. This year, we also read from Genesis and the Fall of Man. In this reading, we hear how Eve (and subsequently Adam) are tempted to doubt God's goodness, His love, and His providence. I think this is the fundamental basis of every temptation.

God has gifted us with so much! The very fact that we ARE, that we exist in this moment, is a sign of His love, for His love upholds us in being at this very moment. He gives us so many graces to get close to Him. When we are tempted to sin, we are tempted to disbelieve God and His love. When He tells us that sin brings only death, we often reject that and think that He is keeping something from us. When we are feeling empty, forgotten, abandoned and in need of comfort, too often we fly to the things of the world instead of to God.

Why? Because we don't trust that He will fulfill our every need, that He is the only One who can fill our emptiness, that He is the only One who can heal our existential loneliness. So, we reach out, like Eve, to take things into our own hands. If only Adam and Eve had trusted God, they would have endured through the struggle for God Himself to give them this fruit, and, instead of taking and grasping, they would have received with open hands the gift God desired to give them.

How do we grasp at the gifts God wants to give? All of creation is gift, but we often grasp at it, instead of patiently waiting to receive the gift from the Hand of the Lord. Do we really trust Him to fulfill our needs? Like Jesus, we sometimes have to go through a desert. Like Jesus, we may even have to endure the Cross. But the Cross is the only way to new life, to Resurrection – Good Friday is the only way to Easter! If we persist in trust, He will care for us.

Jesus always trusted His Father. Even when He was in Agony in the Garden, He said, "Your will, not mine be done." Through the temptations toward sensual pleasure, wonders, self-autonomy and power, Jesus continued to keep His eyes fixed on His Heavenly Father, and was able to trust in Him through the temptation. Do we trust God's providential love and care?

I think about how St. Ignatius encourages us when in desolation to remember that God's grace is *always sufficient for overcoming temptations*. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed by temptation. Oh yes, it is true they can be strong, so strong! Yet, God's grace is always there. We always have *enough* grace (though not always the super-abundance we would desire) to overcome temptation. If we remember that, if we call it to mind in the moments of temptation, it can strengthen us to overcome.

A couple of other practical helps for the moment of temptation. We can stop a rolling snowball with a finger, but if it gets big and fast enough (like an avalanche), it becomes much harder to stop. So it is with temptation: if we stop it at its very first thought, we will not fall prey to its power. If Eve had either walked away from the serpent, or rejected him outright (she should have known there was something wrong with the situation – after all, snakes don't talk), she would not have succumbed. Second, if we have something that can draw our mind back to the love of the Father when we are tempted, then our desires can be set aright. For instance, I set up a playlist of songs when I'm feeling drawn toward desolation. Most of these are praise songs that can help me grow closer to God's love. In those moments of temptation, if we resist in little ways and turn our mind to praise of God (possibly through song), we will have come a long way on the road of resisting temptation.

As we enter into Lent, let us submit our temptations to the Lord, asking Him always to remind us that He really cares for us, and His will is loving, and He only wants our good.